



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

1230 YORK AVENUE

NEW YORK, NY 10021

June 15, 1979

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

Dr. Robert S. Millen
177 Wheatley Road
Brookville
Glen Head, New York 11545

Dear Dr. Millen:

Thank you for your letter of May 30th. I have no doubt at all that the nursing profession needs a serious reexamination but so, for that matter, does the problem of establishing clinical sensitivity for newly educated physicians.

I do not know whether you were aware of the uproar that greeted me when, through my own lack of appreciation of the dynamics of the situation, I was challenged with having ignored the nursing profession. This is by way of explaining some of the remarks in the enclosed copy of my letter to Dean Lambertsen of the New York Hospital-Cornell Nursing School. That occasion led me to try to collect what thoughts I could offer about the nursing-doctor relationship but I would be the first to insist on my purely amateur standing on this particular subject.

I am not sure how the policies that led to the close of the nursing school relate to the issues you are bringing out in your letter and its enclosures. The professional nursing organizations appear, quite understandably, to be moving to higher and higher professional and academic credentials which may be in conflict with some of the proposals in your letter. (By the way my own hospital experience, mentioned in the enclosure, was also at the Hospital for Special Surgery). I do not see any conflict between learning from books and clinically directed experience; and surely some appropriate mix of these is ideally to be sought for both the nursing and medical professions. I believe you are suggesting that there be a less rigorously defined boundary between the practical nurse and the registered nurse; I am also suggesting that there ought to be a comparable latitude between the nurse and the physician, at

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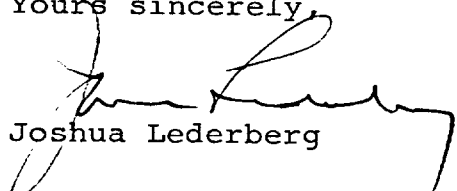
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least with respect to life-long educational opportunities for movement from one to the other channel.

However, after the experience of May 23, I suspect that my own voice is not the one most likely to be sought after for further comment on nursing education.

As to your comment on phlebotomy: the situation you described is of course quite notoriously ubiquitous. But it becomes self-fulfilling, since if the young interns don't get the chance at some experience -- perhaps with some minor butchery during the learning process -- they will never develop either the skill or the self-confidence. Nevertheless, I have never permitted myself to be punctured by a resident if an experienced nurse was anywhere in sight.

Yours sincerely,



Joshua Lederberg

Encl.

copy + ltr in CUMC - May 23, 1979 folder